

Telecommunications Commission - MINUTES - February 26, 2009

I. Call to Order

Chair Terry Lottes called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. in the County Administration conference room in the Administration Center, located at 1300 Courthouse Road.

II. Roll Call

The following members were present: Terry Lottes, Thomas Kimbrell, Danielle Davis, John Johnson, Jr., and Edward Sullivan. Also in attendance were Marie Schuler with Comcast and Paul Miller from Verizon. Michele Lansford, Public Information Office, represented the County.

III. Presentations by the Public

Jackie Hontz, 620 Lendall Lane, told the members about a problem she had with Cox service after purchasing new high definition televisions. She said several channels dropped off the air, and there was no sound on one television. She called the Cox customer service number, and a technician came to her home on January 27th. He told her she needed a new box, but another tech who visited the next day said it was an outside signal problem, and that someone would come the next day to fix it. Several days passed with no further contact from Cox. She was unable to talk to anyone at Cox, and finally called commission member Alicia Knight.

After two more technicians attempted to fix the problem (one of whom did not show up when scheduled), the NBC, ABC and CBS affiliates dropped off air, Internet service on the computer upstairs ended. The problem was finally diagnosed, once again, as a bad box. – it was replaced and normal service resumed.

Ms. Hontz said that Cox should have kept in touch with her, rather than her having to call them repeatedly, and that the problem should have been fixed sooner that it was. She also said she is requesting that Cox adjust her bill for the time she was without service.

IV. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Sullivan moved to approve the January 2009 minutes with one change; Mr. John Johnson seconded the motion; it passed unanimously.

V. Members' Concerns

Tom Kimbrell asked Mr. Miller if Verizon had determined yet whether their fiber installation was causing garage doors to open on their own. He said that a technician visited Mr. Burke's residence, and could not find anything related to Verizon's construction that would cause the problem.

Mr. Lottes said that he and Ms. Knight had been quoted in a recent news articles about efforts to provide broadband services to underserved areas of the County. He received many calls and e-

mails from citizens who cannot get cable service, even though their neighbors have it. He said this is usually due to the home being set at the back of large lots that fail to meet the density requirement in the franchise agreements.

He requested that the cable company representatives provide information about how they calculate charge to run fiber to these homes. He feels that the charges are not consistent, and seem to be too high in some cases.

Ms. Schuler said that Comcast has no formula, that the charges are based on the distance. For longer drops, a larger capacity, more costly fiber must be used. Mr. Lottes responded that he understands that extra amplifiers cost money, but that a charge of \$10,000 for 1,100 feet of fiber seems unreasonable. Ms. Schuler said she will investigate and report back to the commission.

Ms. Davis asked Ms. Schuler about the status of service to Augustine North, Section 5A – Ms. Schuler said she would check and let her know.

VI. Presentation by County Tourism Manager

Tourism Manager M.C. Moncure and Jeff Campbell with TimelessTV™ presented additional information about proposed programming for the government cable channels. Ms. Moncure is working with Mr. Campbell to produce 30-minute videos, to be updated periodically, highlighting tourism destinations, shopping, lodging and restaurants.

Mr. Campbell presented a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the commission's review, and requested that they send it to the Board of Supervisors for approval. He said that the programming will include National Park Service information, and videos about George Washington and Ferry Farm, museums, historic sites, golf courses, recreation facilities, shopping, hotels, entertainment and dining.

When Ms. Davis asked what percentage of the programming would focus on Stafford County, he replied that at least 60 percent since it appears that Stafford would be the first locality to sign on. If the City of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County agree to participate, programming will be split among the localities. The videos will initially run on the Comcast, Cox and Verizon government channels.

In response to a question from Ms. Davis, he assured the commission that no advertising would be sold for any programming that airs on the government channels. Business owners, however, can choose to sponsor certain programs.

Mr. Lottes asked how often the programs will change. Mr. Campbell replied quarterly during the first year, then more often as sponsorships increase. Ms. Moncure said that as more organizations and business owners become aware of the programs, they will want to have information about their initiatives and services aired.

The members discussed the MOU and requested that Mr. Campbell make certain revisions. He said he would draft a new document and send it to the commission via e-mail. The commission vote on the issue at the meeting on March 26, 2009.

VII. Agenda Additions

There were no additions to the agenda.

VIII. New Business

BROADBAND

Mr. Lottes asked the cable representatives if cable companies in Virginia have prepared lists of areas that are underserved as far as broadband access. Ms. Schuler said Comcast has given the state addresses which are served by her company. She said she will check to see if Comcast has addressed underserved areas.

Ms. Davis asked Mr. Miller what the schedule is for buildout to Meadowbrook Lane. He replied that service will eventually reach that area. She said the commission won't know how much of a broadband coverage problem there is until they can examine all the data.

Mr. Kimbrell said he performed a search of the Virginia sites, and could not find maps showing street-by-street coverage. He said that the state is concentrating on finding out how many businesses cannot access broadband.

Ms. Schuler said she will talk to someone at Comcast to see if there is more information available online.

PUBLIC ACCESS TELEVISION

Mr. Lottes postponed discussion until Ms. Knight presents her update at the meeting on March 26.

IX. Adjournment

At 8:25 p.m., Mr. Kimbrell moved to adjourn the meeting; Mr. John Johnson, Jr. seconded the motion; it passed unanimously.